European Commission -
Speech
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Speech by Commissioner Micallef at the Ukraine Recovery Conference - Culture panel

Rome, 11 July 2025

Ukrainian culture is European culture.

It is a vital thread in the rich tapestry of our shared heritage.

And in this moment, when that culture is under threat, we have a collective duty— to recognise its value and to protect it.

Prima di procedere oltre, voglio ringraziare il Ministro Sangiuliano e il Governo italiano.

Grazie per averci accolto nella magnifica città di Roma.

Roma—l'eterna città—A place that reminds us of the enduring power of culture.

Its layers of history, its architecture, its art.

Every corner of this city speaks to the role culture plays in shaping identity, legacy, and democracy.

There could be no more fitting backdrop for a conversation about culture, and no better moment to put culture—finally—at the top of the agenda.

So thank you, for your leadership in recognising the power and the importance of culture—especially in times of war.

In Ukraine, we are witnessing a war of aggression.

It is physical. It is brutal. And it deliberately targets civilians.

But it is more than that.It is also a war of disinformation.

A war on values. And a war on culture.

For more than three years, Ukraine's cultural heritage has been under attack. UNESCO has already verified damage to more than 500 cultural heritage sites. Let's be clear: this is not accidental.

These are not collateral damages. These are strategic attacks.

Calculated, deliberate attempts to erase identity.

Because aggressors know something fundamental:

Nations are not just defined by borders or land.

They are defined by their values, by their people, by their stories, and by their culture.

So if you want to destroy a country, you attack its culture.

And yet—Ukraine stands strong. Ukraine has defended its people.

Ukraine has defended its culture. Ukraine has defended our shared values. It has shown the world that when a society unites behind its identity, its heritage, and its democratic ideals—it becomes unbreakable.

That is why we are here today. To stand with Ukraine.

To stand for culture. And to act—together.

As Commissioner for Culture, I am proud to announce, the first-ever Team Europe Approach in the cultural sector. This is Team Europe for Ukraine. Team Europe for culture. We are uniting our efforts

because we know this truth: we are stronger together.

And in the face of aggression, we will not stand still.

This initiative brings together pledges from 22 EU Member States, alongside support from the European Commission.

65 actions in total, structured across three key pillars:

Protection: 17 actions to provide safe storage, shelter, and exhibition spaces for cultural artefacts under threat.

Conservation: 17 actions focused on documenting and digitalising cultural heritage.

Capacity Building: 31 actions offering training, scholarships, and support to Ukraine's cultural and creative professionals.

From emergency training in safeguarding cultural property, to the conservation and exhibition of Ukrainian artworks, to the provision of essential equipment for preservation and restoration.

I'm also pleased to announce an additional 2 million euro for the second special Creative Europe call, bringing total support for Ukraine's cultural and creative sectors this year to 7 million euro.

This comes on top of 48 million euro already mobilised since the beginning of the war.

And just last week, I presented to the Minister a study that will help lay the groundwork for a Cultural Heritage Fund for Ukraine—providing crucial research and policy recommendations.

But none of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of our Member States.

To the Ministers of Culture—thank you.

Since launching this initiative after my conversation with the Minister last February in Uzhhorod, your commitment has been extraordinary.

Thanks to you, we have a united front.

The first ever Team Europe Approach in Culture.

Let me end with an appeal.

To artists. To creators. To the cultural community across Europe:

Thank you—for standing with Ukraine.

Thank you—for being tireless advocates for our shared values.

Now, help us carry this message further.

Help us multiply initiatives like this one.

Help us build a Europe that stands together in culture, just as it does in diplomacy, in defence, in democracy. Because culture builds resilience.

It preserves values. It passes on memory and meaning across generations. And when we invest in culture, we invest in people.

We invest in ideas. As Victor Hugo once said:

“Nothing else in the world… not all the armies… is so powerful as an idea whose time has come.” Let us remember that culture, too, is an idea—An idea rooted in freedom, in dignity, in creativity.

Backing it is an act of preservation, defiance and hope.

And ultimately, an investment in a stronger, freer, more resilient tomorrow.

Grazie. Slava Ukraini.

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